

## STRAY NOTES ON PAPUAN ETHNOLOGY.

BY C. HEDLEY, F.L.S.

## I. THE CASSOWARY FIGURE HEAD.

(Plate LVIII., fig. 1.)

A distinctive feature of the carving of Eastern New Guinea is the prevalence of bird forms or their derivatives. Prof. A. C. Haddon devotes to the discussion of this subject a considerable section of his admirable essay on "The Decorative Art of British New Guinea."\* Referring to the species depicted, he writes (p. 197):—"I have been unsuccessful in finding out what bird is intended; presumably it is the frigate bird, but this will not account for the frequent representation of a crest." In some instances he thought that a hornbill was recognisable, and quotes Forbes' unpublished notes that occasionally a cockatoo, and in the Louisiades a duck, was represented.

I submit that the evidence advanced below proves that the cassowary is sometimes figured, and suggests that it may be symbolised by the crested bird described by Haddon. On *a priori* grounds the cassowary, an important article of food, a source of valued bone tools, and as a dangerous quarry the theme of many a tale, would loom larger to the Papuan mind than the frigate bird. Again, if the conjoined bird and crocodile design be considered a scene, surely the last of all the fowls of the air to fall a victim to that reptile's rapacity would be the man-o'-war-hawk as sailors term the frigate bird. It is, however, within my own experience that the crane, a crested bird, may make a meal for crocodiles.

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\* Royal Irish Academy. Cunningham Memoirs. No. x.

In July, 1890, I was visiting the village of Polatona, in Bentley Bay, near the eastern extremity of New Guinea. Outside the travellers' house where I lodged, there was planted in the sand of the beach a post about six feet high, carved and painted in red, white and black. It so attracted my attention that I made on the spot a pencil sketch, re-drawn on Plate lviii. My enquiries elicited that it was a canoe stem or figure-head, *geroma*, and that it had once belonged to one of the Chads Bay natives, hanged for the murder of Capt. Ansell.\* It had probably formed a portion of one of the large native sailing vessels, whose hulls are built of several enormous planks sewn together.

An artistically executed bird's head surmounted the pillar. My colleague Mr. North, Ornithologist to the Australian Museum, kindly examined the original drawing, and in discussing it gave me the benefit of his expert knowledge. We agree that the ball placed under the beak and the buttress behind the neck are to be regarded as decorations additional to the original scheme; that the graceful and boldly modelled neck, the general shape of the head, and especially the crest, identify the bird as a kind of cassowary; further, that the line down the neck is an allusion to the brightly coloured space bare of feathers so conspicuous on that bird.

It was not to be expected of the savage artist that his work should afford exact specific recognition of the cassowary he portrayed. The only species recorded from this locality, *Casuarus picticollis*, Sclater, differs markedly by its flattened crest, and no known species, so Mr. North says, has a beak so pronouncedly decurved. But it is possible that a bird still unknown to science was copied by the Papuan craftsman.

The bird's neck issues from the gaping and toothed jaws of the conventionalised crocodile, the angle of whose mouth is carried up in a scroll to form a large eye. In Prof. Haddon's illustrations the usual attitude of the bird seems vertical to the plane of the crocodile; here, on the contrary, it is horizontal. Below, the post

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\* Thomson; British New Guinea, p. 34.

was adorned by a pattern usual in that locality, white zigzag lines on a black ground divided the space into panels filled by a white scroll on a red ground, such as Haddon regards as degenerate and conjoined birds' head. Each panel may possibly typify a crocodilian scute, and certain forwardly directed loops which terminate the carving may even stand for hind limbs in a state of extreme degeneration and reduplication.

## II. THE PALM LEAF CREEL.

(Plate LVIII., fig. 2.)

From its perishable nature this useful domestic utensil is unlikely to have reached a niche in the Ethnological Collection of any Museum. The only mention I have noticed of it in literature is by Lieut. Boyle T. Somerville, who, writing on the New Hebrides, observes\* :—“The coconut palm leaf is very ingeniously woven in all the islands by plaiting together the long tongues of the frond, beginning at the rib and joining the tips. A mouth is made by splitting the rib down the middle, and thus a very capacious basket, with a mouth fitting as tightly as a purse, is quickly made. Pigs, yams, &c., for sale are usually carried in them.” As I have seen no published illustration of this basket, this opportunity is embraced of submitting a sketch made in July, 1890, in a native hut in the village of Mita on the north shore of Milne Bay, British New Guinea. Here they were called *Porha*, and were the exclusive property of the women, who easily manufactured them by doubling the split half of a coconut frond, threading the pinnae under and over in a darning pattern, gathering their ends together and knotting them; the rim being supplied by the split rachis. So much were these associated with women's drudgery that the men considered it quite undignified for them to touch one. A youth whom I commissioned to bring me a specimen to draw, amused me by carrying the offensive article at arm's length and flinging it down before me with an expression

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\* “Journal of the Anthropological Institute, xxiii., p. 378.

of disgust. A pretty scene every evening in an Eastern Papuan village is a file of women wending their way by the forest path home, each bending under a porha full of fifty or sixty pounds weight of fire-wood or garden produce. The basket is laid across her shoulders somewhat as a North British fisher lass carries her creel of fish, but instead of being slung the porha is caught by the rim in the crook of the porter's fingers.

*Postscript.*—Since writing the above I have been favoured by two veteran missionaries and accomplished ethnologists with the following additional information.

The Rev. Dr. W. Wyatt Gill tells me :—

"This is the common food-basket throughout the South Pacific Islands, and no doubt it is the same in the North Pacific, too. At Mangaia, it is called 'r a u r a u' = 'leaflet-leaflet' (*i.e.*, of the coconut palm). At Rarotonga it is the 'k i k a u.' Now, 'k i k a u' is the name for the coconut leaf or frond. So although a food basket is made from only a part of a frond, it bears the same name as the whole. There are plenty of parallels to this in our own language, *i.e.*, a 'sail' for a 'ship,' &c., &c. At Aitutaki, it is called indifferently 't a p o r a' or 'k e t e.' 'K e t e' means basket in general. Mangaia, Rarotonga and Aitutaki are the three chief islands of the Cook's Group. I have seen exactly the same food baskets at Tahiti and each of the Leeward Islands (now French) as far back as 1852. Their name is 'ete' (*i.e.*, the 'k e t e' of the Cook's Group) I believe."

The Rev. S. Ella writes to me :—"Your drawing of it is a good sketch, only needing the knotting together of the leaflets (pinnæ) to form the bottom. It is the commonest kind of basket used, and is easily and quickly made, the material, the upper end of a coconut leaf, being always at hand. It is not so remarkable that it should be so generally used throughout Polynesia, and in almost exactly similar form and construction, when one considers its simplicity almost self-suggestive, and the general abundance of the materials; women and children make them with ease. Your description of its construction is correct. It is employed for

common purposes, carrying of taro, yams, husked coconuts, fowls, fish, &c.

“From the coconut leaf mats for placing cooked food before the eaters are formed, also blinds or enclosures to native houses, thatching for outhouses and fans. The plaiting in this case being made a little closer.

“The name of this coconut basket in Motuan (British New Guinea) is ‘bosea’; in Uvean (Loyalty Islands) ‘tang len-nu’; in Aneityumese (New Hebrides) ‘burabura,’ or with the article prefixed ‘naburabura’; in Samoan (Navigator Islands) and cognate dialects ‘atolau-niu.’

“The better class of baskets are formed from the pandanus leaf, or dressed fibre of the native hibiscus. These are more durable and carefully preserved, made in various shapes and sometimes ornamented with beads, feathers, &c. The coconut leaf basket is thrown away after it has served its purpose for the occasion.”

## ON APPARENTLY UNDESCRIBED STRUCTURES IN THE LEAVES OF CERTAIN PLANTS.

BY ALEX. G. HAMILTON.

After this paper had been read it was discovered that similar structures had been described by Lundström as “Acaro-domatia.” (Pflanzenbiologische Studien. ii. Die Anpassungen der Pflanzen an Thiere). By the permission of the Council the paper has been withdrawn in order that Lundström’s important work may be taken into consideration.